Artistic Exploration for the Development of Soft and Digital Skills

Project Code: 2024-1-IT02-KA220-ADU-000245461

Joint report WP2

The impact of art on the development of soft skills and digital skills of adults in Europe

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1. Introduction

In the context of lifelong education, the role of art is increasingly configured as a transformative tool capable of activating latent resources, stimulating critical reflection, strengthening social inclusion and promoting the acquisition of transversal and digital skills.

The European project ARTSKILLS is part of this framework with the ambition to explore and systematize the contribution of art in adult learning pathways.

This comparative report aims to relate the results of the three national reports drawn up by the project partners – Italy, Sweden and Romania – with the aim of providing an articulated and critical reading of the evidence collected. The intent is twofold: on the one hand, to enhance the points of contact and shared good practices; on the other hand, to give voice to the specificities of the territorial, cultural and methodological contexts that each partner has documented.

In addition to the comparison, this document is proposed as a methodological guide for the construction of innovative e-learning training courses, capable of promoting adult education through the synergy between art and technology.

2. Evaluation criteria for national reports

To analyse the reports drawn up by the partners, an evaluation framework was built that takes into account five main dimensions:

- **Completeness**: verification of the presence of the main sections required, including the national context, impact description, practical examples and operational recommendations.
- **Methodological quality**: examination of data collection strategies, the use of theoretical sources and the analytical rigor applied.
- **Empirical evidence**: evaluation of the consistency and variety of qualitative and quantitative data provided (interviews, case studies, pilot experiences).

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- **Critical approach**: presence of an articulated reflection on the limits, challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of art-based approaches.
- **Innovation**: ability to identify and describe innovative, replicable and scalable digital learning approaches, tools or environments.

This grid guided the cross-reading of the national reports and formed the basis for the elaboration of the following paragraphs, which are developed in a discursive form to encourage a more in-depth analysis.

3. Summary and comparison of national reports

The comparative analysis of the Italian, Swedish and Romanian national reports revealed both significant convergences and distinct approaches, deriving from the different educational traditions, political frameworks and socio-cultural contexts of reference.

Although starting from heterogeneous theoretical and operational frameworks, the three documents converge on the centrality of art as a lever for the activation of transformative educational processes, capable of affecting the deepest dimensions of adult learning: motivation, self-awareness, active participation in community life, the ability to adapt to change.

3.1 The Italian context

The Italian report stands out for the breadth of the theoretical documentation and the richness of the experiences examined. The analysis moves on two intertwined levels: on the one hand, the updated snapshot of the level of skills of the adult population, supported by OECD-Piaac data; on the other, a critical review of the educational policies and practices that in Italy have made art a tool for social and digital empowerment.

Central to this document is the role attributed to the Universities of the Third Age (in particular the experience of the UNITRE of Fondi), considered as laboratories of non-formal education where art becomes a vehicle for well-being, relationships and active learning. The authors point out that

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artistic practices, such as painting, creative writing and autobiographical storytelling, have produced measurable positive effects on the development of empathy, interpersonal communication and digital self-efficacy, especially among participants over 60.

The methodological approach is mainly qualitative, enriched by references to innovative museum projects (e.g. MAXXI), the use of digital environments (Artsteps, ArtCentrica) and STEAM paths. The Italian report excels in linking local practices to international theoretical frameworks, offering a layered and coherent picture of the phenomenon.

3.2 Sweden's contribution

The Swedish report, prepared by the partner Hyper Island, is presented as a structured analysis, guided by a systematic review of the literature and a reflection on public policies on adult education. What emerges strongly is the depth with which Sweden has integrated the concepts of experiential learning and digital training in all segments of the adult population, with a constant focus on social inclusion.

Through the documentation of projects such as "Playmäkers" and "Studio DöBra", the report highlights the ability of artistic practices to generate intergenerational connections, strengthen social cohesion and enable relational and digital skills. The tone is reflective and oriented towards the construction of policy recommendations, rather than the simple description of practices.

However, it should be noted that there is a lack of qualitative data collected directly through interviews or focus groups, which limits the immediacy of the link with the final beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the report stands out for the high quality of the theoretical framework and the use of institutional sources, which increase its systemic relevance.

3.3 The Romanian framework

The Romanian report, prepared by the CONIL Centre, adopts a mixed methodological approach: the review of the literature and the analysis of national policies is accompanied by the documentation of case studies accompanied by interviews with stakeholders, educators and

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participants in the workshops. The strength of the document lies in its ability to return, in a lively and concrete way, the voice of the people involved.

The emphasis on the inclusion of ethnic minorities (in particular the Roma population and rural communities) makes the Romanian contribution particularly relevant from an intercultural point of view. Experiences such as "Colors of Empathy" and the "Forum Theatre" show how the artistic dimension can break barriers of prejudice and build new ways of communication and collaboration.

With an education system that is still developing and a widespread lack of digital infrastructure, the creativity and adaptability of trainers is a key asset. The participatory approach adopted has made it possible to identify replicable good practices and to outline a first framework for assessing the impact of artistic practices on soft and digital skills.

4. European reference policies

This chapter explores the European regulatory and strategic framework within which the ARTSKILLS project is placed, with the aim of highlighting how the practices promoted by the partners respond to the priorities and guidelines outlined by the EU institutions in the field of adult education, digital skills and the development of soft skills.

In recent years, the European Union has paid increasing attention to the issue of lifelong learning, recognizing it as one of the fundamental pillars to ensure social cohesion, economic competitiveness and democratic participation. The very concept of competence has been expanded to include not only technical-specialized skills, but also relational attitudes, communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, spirit of initiative and digital literacy.

4.1 The European strategic framework: from DigComp to the Skills Agenda

Among the main references is the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens – DigComp 2.2, updated in 2022 – which systematically outlines five key areas: computer literacy,

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digital communication and collaboration, content creation, security, and problem solving. The intent of the ARTSKILLS project to develop digital skills through artistic and narrative methods fully responds to the logic of DigComp, where the importance of motivational, creative and culturally sensitive approaches is emphasized.

Another central document is the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020), which sets out twelve strategic actions for skills building in the Union. These include, in particular: the promotion of lifelong learning, the strengthening of education-work partnerships, the recognition and validation of skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

The ARTSKILLS project fits perfectly into this framework, as it fosters the acquisition of transversal skills in non-formal contexts, enhancing artistic experience and civic participation as educational spaces. In particular, the experiences reported in the Italian, Swedish and Romanian national reports document the effectiveness of artistic practices to facilitate critical reflection, cooperation, self-efficacy and adaptation to digital challenges.

4.2 New European Bauhaus: art, sustainability and inclusion

A further innovative reference is represented by the New European Bauhaus movement, launched by the European Commission in 2020, which calls for rethinking collective living spaces by combining sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion. In this framework, art is not only a tool for personal expression, but becomes a catalyst for urban regeneration, community cohesion and democratic participation.

The NEB represents a valuable opportunity for art-based educational paths, such as those developed by the ARTSKILLS project, which aim to involve adults with heterogeneous backgrounds in collective creative processes, capable of restoring meaning and beauty to social relationships and shared spaces. The link between art, technology and sustainability is in fact a common thread that runs through many of the experiences documented in the national reports, from participatory theatre in rural Romanian contexts, to collaborative design thinking practices in Sweden, to interactive digital exhibitions in Italy.

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4.3 Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda: inclusive and quality education for all

No less relevant is the reference to Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: "Ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". This goal embodies the vision that education must be accessible, culturally relevant, innovative and based on people's needs throughout their lives.

ARTSKILLS activities contribute in a concrete way to this goal, as they offer tools and methodologies that are also accessible to adult population groups traditionally excluded from formal training courses: migrants, the elderly, people with a low level of education or lack of digital skills. The combination of artistic practices and digital tools – modulated on the cultural and linguistic specificities of each country – represents a concrete example of an integrated, intercultural and participatory educational approach.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the ARTSKILLS project is fully within the most advanced European strategies in the field of education, skills and inclusion. The experiences gathered in the three partner countries show that visual arts, theatre, storytelling and design can act as powerful levers to make lifelong learning an effective right and a daily practice.

Through a skilful integration of local policies, digital tools and a European vision, ARTSKILLS not only contributes to responding to concrete training needs, but opens up new spaces of meaning to rethink adult education in the twenty-first century.

5. Innovative methodological approaches

The analysis of the three national reports confirms that the adoption of innovative methodological approaches is a key element for the effective development of soft and digital skills in adult training courses. The experiences documented by the Italian, Swedish and Romanian partners illustrate a variety of pedagogical practices that make art not only an educational content, but above all a learning methodology. In this section, these approaches are examined in the light of their effectiveness, replicability and consistency with the principles of lifelong learning.

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5.1 Experiential learning and creative approaches

A common thread that runs through all the case studies collected is the use of experiential learning, i.e. an educational process that involves the person as a whole – mind, body and emotions – and which is based on active participation, confrontation with concrete experience and shared reflection. In this context, art becomes a powerful device to activate transformative processes.

In Italy, for example, autobiographical workshops at the Universities of the Third Age have shown how creative writing, painting and storytelling can stimulate self-awareness, autobiographical memory and the recognition of emotions. Artistic practices, here, are configured as tools for reworking identity and rebuilding self-confidence, especially in mature age.

In Sweden, the use of artistic co-design models, as in the case of the "Playmäkers Project", has shown how active involvement in the creation of digital public art can strengthen the sense of belonging and the ability to work in a team. Participants were able to explore digital design tools, creating installations that told personal and collective stories.

5.2 Participatory Theatre and Social-Emotional Learning

In Romania, participatory theatre (Forum Theatre) has played a central role in informal adult education. Through role play and conflict simulation, participants developed communication skills, active listening skills, and conflict management strategies. This type of methodology – inspired by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed – allows adults to stage real experiences, share emotions and build alternative solutions together. It is a learning that arises from the body, from the relationship and from the action, and which has proved to be particularly effective for people with marginal backgrounds or in situations of social vulnerability.

5.3 Immersive digital teaching and virtual environments

Another dimension of innovation emerges strongly in the use of immersive digital tools, which make it possible to overcome physical barriers and expand access to artistic knowledge. The Italian experience with platforms such as Artsteps and ArtCentrica offers an emblematic example of how technology can be put at the service of creativity and cultural participation.

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In particular, Artsteps allowed groups of adults with limited digital skills to explore virtual museums, interact with works of art and build personalized narrative paths. The proposed educational guide included visual storytelling exercises, intercultural comparison activities and critical observation sheets, thus fostering both digital literacy and cultural empowerment.

5.4 Study Circles and co-creation of meaning

In Sweden, the approach of "studio circles" – co-creative, self-organised, discussion-based learning groups – has been successfully adapted into artistic contexts. These circles facilitated processes of intergenerational co-creation and sharing, especially through activities such as community theatre and social photography workshops. Their strength lies in their ability to put the voice of the participants at the center, promoting horizontal learning, empathy and critical thinking.

5.5 STEAM methods and interdisciplinarity

The STEAM approach – an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics – represents a further fertile ground for educational experimentation. In the ARTSKILLS project, the integration of science, technology and the arts has fostered the development of innovative training courses, in which creativity is combined with analytical rigor. In Italy, modules were experimented in which adults designed digital art installations inspired by scientific concepts, exploring for example the theme of time, the body or landscape through multimedia tools.

5.6 Summary and outlook

The set of methodologies collected in the reports shows that adult learning can greatly benefit from artistic and digital approaches, provided that they are accessible, contextualized and person-centered. The added value of art, in this sense, lies not only in its ability to "embellish" the educational experience, but in its power to generate meaning, activate critical thinking and transform relationships.

For the future, it seems essential to invest in the training of trainers, so that they can integrate artistic, pedagogical and digital skills in a fluid way. Only in this way will it be possible to build

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truly inclusive educational environments, capable of responding to the complexity of the contemporary world.

6. Digital tools experimented in art-based courses for adults

In the analysis carried out, the use of digital tools has taken on a central function to ensure accessibility, inclusion and flexibility in training courses aimed at the adult population. National partners selected and studied different platforms and applications that integrate with active artistic methodologies and pedagogies. In this section, the most significant technological solutions are explored, analyzing their characteristics, contexts of use and observed impact.

6.1 Artsteps: virtual environments for artistic storytelling

Artsteps is an online platform that allows you to create three-dimensional virtual exhibitions, which can be explored in immersive mode. In Italy, it has been widely used to facilitate access to cultural heritage even by adults with reduced mobility or living in peripheral areas. Through guided tours, participants were able not only to visit digital collections, but also to build personal exhibitions based on biographical or thematic narratives.

Practical example: a group of adults over 65 created a virtual exhibition entitled "The colors of memory", in which each participant selected images, poems and works of art that represented significant moments in their lives. The activity was accompanied by autobiographical writing exercises, group discussions and collective evaluation.

6.2 ArtCentrica: Exploring Art Through Digital Interactivity

ArtCentrica is an educational tool based on high-resolution works, which allows you to zoom, explore details, contextualize iconographies and make comparisons. Used in Italian and Romanian contexts, it has been a powerful catalyst for developing basic digital skills, critical observation skills and visual literacy.

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During the workshops, the educators proposed collaborative challenges ("find the anomaly", "tell the scene", "create your own visit route") aimed at stimulating creativity, teamwork and the conscious use of digital devices. Participants were accompanied step-by-step through accessible tutorials and self-study modules.

6.3 Platforms for e-learning and co-creation

In Sweden, digital infrastructure was leveraged to design participatory virtual environments, where art became a tool for collective expression. Through platforms such as Miro, Padlet and Jamboard, groups of adults were able to co-design installations, concept maps and visual storytelling.

Case study: In the "Studio DöBra" project, adults of different generations explored the topic of family memory by using online collaboration tools to create a digital "memory map", consisting of images, videos and texts. The process fostered emotional sharing and intergenerational inclusion.

6.4 Audiovisual tools and digital storytelling workshops

In Romania, the use of open source software for video editing (OpenShot, Shotcut) has allowed small groups of adults with low digital skills to produce short narrative videos based on personal experiences or local stories. The workshop included a phase of technical training, one of collective conception and one of assisted editing, culminating in the public sharing of productions.

These activities showed how the integration of visual language, technology and autobiography can enhance communication skills, strengthen self-esteem and create opportunities for social recognition.

6.5 Social media and artistic micro-narratives

Even social media, often perceived as tools of superficial entertainment, have been reinterpreted in an educational key. Some partners guided adults in the creation of artistic micro-narratives (visual poems, commented photographs, stories in sequences) to be published on Instagram or

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Facebook. This made it possible to familiarize themselves with the main digital tools and to promote active cultural citizenship.

Digital tools are not simply "means" to convey artistic content, but real learning environments, capable of transforming educational relationships, activating curiosity, facilitating inclusion and enhancing the latent skills of adults. The choice of intuitive, accessible and adaptable tools is decisive to engage even the least digitally literate participants.

Looking ahead, it seems essential to consolidate the integration between art and technology, investing in inclusive platforms, technical training of trainers and digital environments that promote creativity, collaboration and critical sense.

7. Recommendations for policy makers, educators and cultural institutions

The comparative analysis of the national reports and case studies implemented in the three partner countries made it possible to outline a set of strategic recommendations addressed to the main stakeholders of the educational, cultural and political system. These recommendations aim to provide a clear direction to strengthen the integration between the arts, digital technologies and lifelong learning, with a particular focus on vulnerable adult groups or those at risk of exclusion.

7.1 For policymakers

Policy makers are called upon to support systemic change that recognizes and enhances the educational potential of art and creativity in an inclusive and digital way. It is suggested to:

- **Institutionalize art-based practices** in adult education programs, through national and regional guidelines that encourage their structural integration.

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- **Provide dedicated and stable funding** to support projects that combine artistic languages, social inclusion and digital tools, particularly in rural, peripheral or economically disadvantaged contexts.
- **Promote the formal recognition of skills acquired** through non-formal and informal art-based paths, through the adoption of tools such as Open Badges and training microcredits.
- **To foster synergies between the educational, cultural and labour sectors**, encouraging public-private partnerships that enhance creative and transversal skills also in professional contexts.

7.2 For educators, trainers and socio-cultural operators

The role of educators is crucial in creating stimulating, accessible and meaningful learning environments for adults. The following recommendations are intended to guide their daily work:

- **Develop hybrid skills**, integrating pedagogical dimension, artistic sensitivity and digital literacy. This requires ongoing education, peer coaching, and open educational resources.
- **Adopt a person-centered approach**, which values individual experience, favors biographical narration and promotes the co-construction of knowledge.
- **Use inclusive digital tools**, accessible even for those with low schooling or little technological familiarity, and capable of stimulating creative interaction (e.g. digital storytelling, virtual galleries, community podcasts).
- **Cultivating communities of practice**, encouraging discussion between professionals and the documentation of experiences, to promote the dissemination of good practices at local and transnational level.

7.3 For cultural institutions: museums, libraries, archives, theatres

Cultural institutions can and should play an active role in promoting adult education through art. The following guidelines provide insights to strengthen this feature:

- **Opening up to local communities** through participatory workshops, artist residencies, cycles of events and co-designed paths with adult audiences.

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- **Digitize and make accessible its content**, developing user-friendly platforms, virtual paths and artistic mediation tools that stimulate autonomous use.
- **Actively collaborate with the educational world**, offering spaces, skills and collections for educational activities, interdisciplinary projects and cultural citizenship paths.
- **Supporting artists and educators working in complex social contexts**, through scholarships, mentorships and outreach projects that encourage social innovation.

The recommendations presented here are not to be understood as rigid prescriptions, but as flexible guidelines that each reality can decline according to its own characteristics, resources and objectives. What emerges strongly from the work of ARTSKILLS is the need to overcome the dichotomy between formal and non-formal education, between "high" culture and popular culture, between technical and creative knowledge.

Promoting a culture of lifelong learning means recognising that every adult, regardless of their social, cultural or digital status, has the right to meaningful, stimulating and transformative educational paths. In this vision, art and technology are not accessory tools, but powerful levers to rewrite the education of the future.

8. Topics of the ARTSKILLS e-learning course

In the light of the results collected in the national reports and the principles that emerged from the comparative reflection, important topics emerged aimed at exploring the potential of art to promote transversal and digital skills in adults.

The topics identified made it possible to structure the e-learning course into six thematic modules, each designed to be accessible, inclusive and adaptable to different cultural contexts, even for adults with low digital literacy.

The modules will be assigned to specific partners based on their skills and experience:

- **Module 1: Digital storytelling and collaborative platforms** (by Teleconsys)

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- **Objectives**: To develop narrative, digital and collaborative skills through the creation of digital stories.
- **Course unit contents**: Fundamentals of digital storytelling, structuring of digital storytelling (concept maps and storyboards), research and selection of media (images, videos, sounds) with attention to copyright, and use of collaborative platforms such as Canva and Padlet.

- **Module 2: Digital Museums and Cultural Citizenship** (by Teleconsys)
  - **Objectives**: To use digital museum environments to develop active citizenship and digital skills.
  - **Contents**: Use of the Artsteps and ArtCentrica platforms, guided paths for the analysis of works of art and digital storytelling, and construction of an autobiographical thematic exhibition online.
- **Module 3: Participatory Theatre and Conflict Resolution** (by Centrul de Meditatii CONIL)
  - **Objectives**: To promote inclusion and intercultural communication.
  - **Course unit contents**: Introduction to the Theatre of the Oppressed, construction of conflictual scenes based on real experiences, and theatrical performance and collective discussion activities.
- **Module 4: Digital Workshops and Collective Memory** (by Centrul de Meditatii CONIL)
  - **Objectives**: To develop digital skills through the enhancement of local heritage.
  - **Course unit** contents: Introduction to visual storytelling, use of open source software for video creation, and production of short video stories and multimedia exhibitions.
- **Module 5: Design thinking and digital public art** (by Hyper Island)
  - **Objectives**: To develop creativity and problem solving through the design method.
  - **Contents**: Phases of Design Thinking (Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test), co-design of digital installations on social issues, and development of a collective art project.
- **Module 6: Emotions, art and intergenerationality** (by Hyper Island)
  - **Objectives**: To stimulate dialogue between generations and emotional literacy.

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- **Course unit contents**: Introduction to social-emotional education, production of visual testimonials, podcasts and "diaries of emotions", and collective creation of a "digital wall of emotions".

Each module will include:

- N. 3 teaching units per module, presented in the form of PowerPoint presentations and transformed by Teleconsys into traceable SCORM packages, available directly online within the platform;
- N. 1 final quiz per module, consisting of 6 closed-ended questions (2 per unit) (only one correct option out of three);
- N. 1 associated practical activity per module, in PDF format. The aim of the activities is to translate the concepts learned in the teaching units into concrete activities to be carried out in the classroom, at home or outdoors (possibly to be documented with videos);
- N. 2-3 optional in-depth materials per module, at the discretion of the partners (e.g. infographics, videos, PDF sheets).

The e-learning platform will be multilingual, accessible from mobile devices and intuitive. Pedagogical coherence will be ensured by an inter-partner coordination team that will supervise teaching uniformity and evaluate training effectiveness through feedback and follow-up

9. Conclusion

The comparative analysis conducted in the report "The impact of art on the development of soft skills and digital competences of adults in Europe" highlights how art, integrated with digital tools, represents a powerful and transversal lever for the lifelong education of adults in different European contexts. The three countries involved – Italy, Sweden and Romania – although starting from different educational traditions and socio-cultural contexts, converge on some key points:

- **Centrality of art in transformative processes**: Art fosters motivation, self-awareness, active participation and the ability to adapt, fundamental elements for adult learning. Artistic

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practices (painting, creative writing, theatre, autobiographical narration) contribute to the development of empathy, communication and self-efficacy, with particular effectiveness among the most vulnerable or marginalised adult groups.

- **Methodological innovation**: The use of experiential methodologies, participatory theatre, digital workshops, studio circles and STEAM approaches demonstrates that artistic learning is not only content, but also method. The integration of digital tools (Artsteps, ArtCentrica, collaborative platforms, video editing software) expands the accessibility and personalization of training courses, facilitating the inclusion of adults with low digital skills.
- **Compliance with European policies**: The ARTSKILLS project is fully in line with the European Union's strategies for lifelong learning, the promotion of digital skills (DigComp), social inclusion and the implementation of Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda. Art is recognized as a catalyst for social cohesion, urban regeneration and active citizenship.
- **Operational recommendations**: To maximize the impact of art-based practices, the report recommends:
    - Institutionalize art in adult education programs.
    - Ensure stable funding and formal recognition of skills acquired in non-formal settings.
    - To train educators with hybrid skills (pedagogical, artistic, digital).
    - Supporting the digitisation and accessibility of cultural content.
    - To foster collaboration between educational, cultural and social institutions1.

In summary, art – enhanced by digital technology – emerges as a privileged tool to make lifelong learning inclusive, motivating and transformative, capable of responding to the challenges of contemporary society.

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